

The Probing of Scripture

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 April 2013

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Amen. Tonight, I'm going to begin a relatively short little series of sermons out of Hebrews chapter 4.

! Really, this kind of short series out of Hebrews is going to give me the time I need to complete something that I want us to do on Sunday nights that's going to seem a little bit different.

But I'm going to kind of, combination of preach and teach and bring into the teaching time some other sources in a series that I'm going to call Sharing the Gospel on the Go.

Sharing the Gospel on the Go. And you're thinking, what? On the Go. You know, everybody's on the go. Right?

Everybody's busy. Now, there may be some here. Some, you know, of the lucky ones who are retired and, you know, and just relaxed and cared in the world.

[1 : 32] And, you know, Jim's one of those. Jim Chastain, he, you know, though I think his wife keeps him pretty busy. But we're all on the go.

And so, what I'm going to do is, and it's kind of multi-purposed, to give us some tools and instructions on, and this is what it's all about, on being a witness of the faith as we go.

And everywhere we go and everywhere we are. Which I think is something we need to do. I know it is for me. And for you. And, you see, we could strictly program the Great Commission.

Make it a program that you sign up for and maybe go through a little training. And then commit yourself to, say, one night a week.

Kind of like grow or maybe something else like that. We could just strictly programize. I don't know if that's a word or not. Some of you can look that up. Don't do it now.

[2 : 46] Now, I used to say that, and people can do that now. They just look it up, you know. To make it just a program. And it's been my experience, of course, over the years that when we do that, and we do it all the time, and rightfully so, at least have some program of outreach, when we do that, we only get a few people who are involved in that.

I mean, let's just face it. It's always a very small percentage of the congregation that will sign up for any kind of training program on soul winning, witnessing, or whatever you want to call it.

And a small percentage of those who actually will come down to the church building and go out and do what has been programmed. Now, I'm not against that, having a program.

And we do have one, by the way, and we'll have one. But what we need to change our thinking about is that as believers, we are all ready to share our gospel everywhere we go.

And it's not a program, not a night of the week or a day of the week or maybe a night of the month. It is just everywhere you go. But when you read the gospels, you discover that Jesus and his disciples, they were proclaiming and sharing the gospel as they went, everywhere they went.

[4 : 23] And that is the method. You see, we have this huge army, in a sense, this huge body of people that we call Highland Park Baptist Church that should be giving witness, testimony, living out the gospel, speaking a word, the word of the gospel, and giving testimony of faith in Christ.

We should be doing that everywhere we are. And so this series is designed to give us some tools on how to do that. Some of you, maybe many of you, and it's a Sunday night, and we might even venture to guess that all of you have been through some kind of witnessing training over the years.

And you'll come, you know, a certain night of the week or Sunday evening or something and do it. But we're going to do it for the whole, at least all those who show up on Sunday night.

And not only some training on how to do that, to share your faith, but also we're going to be providing some tools, some little cards, little pamphlets, little things that you can keep with you, that you can use.

I'm giving some instructions if you carry a New Testament with you, how you might mark that and use that when you have that occasion. And then, you see, the onus is on you.

[5 : 59] The onus is on you to be a faithful witness of your faith in Jesus Christ, a witness of Him. All right, so that's what we're going to be doing, not starting tonight.

Tonight, I'm going to start a short series out of a really important passage of Scripture in Hebrews chapter 4, and it's verses 12 through 16.

And so let me go ahead and read the passage and then say just a short thing about what the main idea is in this passage. And then we'll start this kind of short series on these few verses, really just a few, verses 12 through 16.

The Bible says, For the Word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account. Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

[7 : 20] For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore...

Now that's key to see. It's not only the close of the chapter, but it is the kind of summation of the whole thought process that's been going on here.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

All right, now, several verses and phrases in that relatively short text are familiar to us. I mean, these are not new things to us, and they're familiar.

But we put it all together, and we can learn something, I think, very important about... Well, about prayer. About prayer.

[8 : 22] That's kind of the larger picture here, prayer. And so with this passage, I want to bring to you the first of four sermons out of this short little text.

And I've entitled it, The Bold Approach. Now, you might be confused by that title. What do you mean by that? Well, I'm playing off of what I believe to be the key passage in this text.

In fact, really in the larger text. It's a key passage, not just for those few verses that we've read, but even before that. But it really intensifies, gets to the main idea here as we draw closer to the end of the chapter.

And so the key passage, key phrase, is at the end of the text in verse 16, as I've said. And it's this, let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.

Let us come boldly to the throne of grace. Therefore, that is therefore, everything that he has said prior to this is leading us to this admonition.

[9 : 36] Let us come boldly before the throne of grace. Now, is Tom Holland here tonight? I don't see him anywhere, so I can speak freely.

Paul, Paul is talking about a, of course, there might be some in the camp of Tom Holland, you know. About this authorship of Hebrews, so you might, you know, you probably report to him what I've said here tonight.

But that's okay, doesn't matter to me. He's just an elder in our church, you know, it's not any big deal. Just the police chief of the city. No problem with that.

All right, I can't help myself. I believe Paul wrote Hebrews, all right. And so Paul is talking about something very bold. Not audacious in the sense of kind of a prideful kind of boldness, you know, in that sense.

A daring kind of boldness, you know, where it's kind of fleshly, you know. But a boldness nevertheless. It's a bold approach that he is saying to us that each of us need to have.

[10 : 52] And can have. A bold approach, that is, to God's throne of grace. And I am suggesting to you that the, you know, the idea, the larger idea is communicating with him.

Prayer coming before him. We can come boldly to the throne of grace. And so the Apostle Paul gives us in this text, I think, four realities that serve to compel us to run to God's throne of grace.

Drive us, almost literally drive us to his throne of grace in prayer. There are four realities that reveal to us, I think, very clearly that there is nowhere else for us to go but to his throne of grace.

And there is no one else to turn to but the God of all grace. We're to run to him. And what are these four realities? Well, I'll name them this way. I'll give you all four of them here tonight and then we'll look at each one of these over the next four Sunday nights.

Number one, the probing of Scripture. The probing, the very nature of Scripture that it probes us.

[12:21] That's what we'll look at here tonight, verse 12. The probing of Scripture. Number two, the presence of sin. Compels us, drives us to his throne of grace.

Verse 13, the presence of sin. Third, the pity of the Savior. Verses 14, 15. And then finally, the provision of salvation.

Provision of salvation, verse 16. All right, so tonight, the probing of Scripture. Look again at verse 12. Look at it closely. For the word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Now, I think you would agree with me that this is a very interesting passage of Scripture. Now, at least part of it is familiar, all right. But what does it mean, all of this?

We might have some ideas about that. We might be correct about that. But let's just kind of pick it apart and look at it. When we understand each part of this kind of famous verse of Scripture, we understand each part and what each part means and how they all fit together, then I think we're going to make some important conclusions about the word of God.

[13:47] For example, why reading it is sometimes unsettling to us. Have you ever had that experience? I mean, I love God's word. You do too.

Sometimes it's unsettling. We're going to learn why that is. I think we learned that from this passage. So we're going to learn why reading it is sometimes unsettling to us and therefore why we do not read it as often as we do.

And also why the devil hates God's word and has tried from the very beginning to have it destroyed. And he's still working on that and motivating others to downgrade it and to ultimately to destroy it.

And more importantly, we're going to learn how God's word then drives us to the throne of grace. All right, so Paul begins by saying, for the word of God.

That's how he introduces that verse in this kind of section of the chapter. The word of God. So we're not in doubt about what's in view here. It's the Bible.

[14:59] It's the written word of God. God's holy word. It is the Bible. But now what does he say about God's word? Well, I want to give you five things out of this verse of Scripture.

Five things about the word of God. The first is this. You can just identify it with this word. Alive.

That's what he says about the word of God. It is alive. Now that's something unique. There isn't any other book that can claim that.

In fact, every other book written by man is dead. Certainly within a short period of time. Dead and past and outdated.

But God's word is alive. But it's alive not just in the sense that there's no dating of it. No obsolete nature of the Bible.

[16:04] It's alive in a very real way. Paul said in verse 12, For the word of God is living. It's living.

Now, how many of you have a King James? Raise your hand. King James with you. Not very many. I feel like I'm compelled to explain something here because the King James doesn't have the word living.

It has quick, doesn't it? And so you might be a little confused about that. That's the King James Old English. And it was a word that perfectly fit in that day.

And we probably, if you've been a King James person all your life, like I have until not too many years ago, then you've kind of grown up with it and you understand what it's talking about.

Maybe we need to clarify a little bit. It would be a little bit confusing. The word of God is quick? What does that mean? We know the English language is a living language.

[17:06] All right? So, like all living things, it's changing. And so, with the English language, because it's a living language, words are being added. A lot of words are being added.

Words that I can't even pronounce it, you know, and understand. But words are being added and words are also being dropped off. That's the nature of living, a living language. And so, words and their meanings and their usage are in a constant state of change.

That's just the nature of all language, the nature of English. Now, to be sure, the word quick is still a word we use. It hasn't dropped out of our language, has it?

We use the word quick today. But we don't use the word quick in the way the King James translators used it and meant it from their day, from their culture. And so, what does it mean? Well, we have to look at the original language to get at the author's meaning. And the word that Paul used in the passage is the Greek word zoe, which means life.

[18:15] Life, we get our word zoology from this Greek word zoe. Now, this is, I think, instructive even for those who don't have the King James in front of them.

Understand how important this word living is. Life. It's alive. So, this is what Paul is saying. The word of God is alive.

And so, Paul, here in verse 4, is telling us that. And then he's also emphasizing it. And this, you can't see in the English translation, no matter what English translation you have.

But it would read literally this way. Living is the word of God. Now, we wouldn't write that way in English. But Paul has put the word living zoe on the front.

And that means he's wanting to emphasize that. That's the way they did it in the Greek language. It's emphatic. Living is the word of God.

[19:16] I tell you, surely you know that this book is not like any other book that has ever been written. It is not just a history book of the great events in biblical history or ancient history.

It is not just the good book, as some call it. This book is alive. I'm not talking about the physical book.

The words in it are alive. Why? Because the author is alive. Still alive today. A lot of books become obsolete and dead because their authors are dead.

And the histories they wrote about are dead. And the words they use, some of them are dead. And even the truth that they have written about has now changed or has been discovered it wasn't true.

And so, but the author of the living word of God is still alive. Continues to live. And so, the book, his book is alive. It is God breathed, after all.

[20:20] Scripture tells us that. He breathed into it. It's living. And I remember the story, and possibly you've heard this story before.

I may have even told it from, not this podium, but that one behind me. The story about Spurgeon. When Spurgeon, he went to his, the Park Street, the chapel there.

And he was about to, you know, kind of check the acoustics in the building. No one was there, so he thought. And he just wanted to check things out. And so, he got into his pulpit. And he quoted the scripture, Behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

Of course, he said it in the Old English, Taketh away the sin of the world. And he just proclaimed that several times. He didn't know it, but there was a workman up in one of the balconies, in behind one of the pews, doing a little work up there.

Because they just, you know, had still had work to do before that Sunday that was coming. And he heard those words. And those words reverberated in his mind and in his heart. And even when he went home, he kept hearing those words, Behold, the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world.

[21:31] And over and over again, it was rolling around in his head until finally, he came to faith in Christ. He was saved. You see, it's the living Word of God.

It's alive. It's not dead. Also, Paul says this about the Word of God. It is active. Not just living, but actively living.

Actively alive. He says in verse 12, For the Word of God is living and powerful. Powerful.

Now that's an important word in this verse. As it speaks about the Word of God, it identifies the Word of God. It's powerful.

It's the Greek word energe. Energe. We get our word energy from it. Or energize. Energeis.

[22:34] Or energe. Or energeos. I mean, there are several different forms of it. But the root of it is that it is powerful. It literally is something that puts forth power.

And so this is what Paul is saying about the Word of God. It is living and powerful. It is actively alive. Paul uses the same word in Philippians chapter 2 verse 13.

Another very well-known verse of Scripture. For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. One of my favorite verses of Scripture.

The word works is this word energeis. So it is God who puts forth power in you so that you can will and do what pleases God.

So the Word of God is actively alive. It is the living Word of the God who is living.

[23 : 36] It is the powerful Word of the God who is powerful. All-powerful. Active. Alive. Third. It is accurate. It is accurate. Now certainly it is accurate in its substance. There aren't any errors in God's Word.

But though that is true and the Bible makes that point in a number of places. The idea here is that it is accurate in what God sends it to do. Paul said it is sharper than any two-edged sword.

Which is an interesting kind of image, isn't it? Actually, Paul is using a Hebrew expression. An expression.

An expression. The sword. When a sword was used to kill. In battle. Or something like that.

[24 : 39] The sharp edge of the sword was called the mouth of the sword. And so to the ancient people, it was like a wild beast, you know, with very sharp teeth.

A wild beast whose mouth would devour and cut its prey. And in the case of a two-edged sword, it would cut it in every direction.

That's the idea here. The two-edged sword was a sword whose mouth cut in every direction. It left nothing uncut. That's the image that Paul wants us to get here.

And that describes the living, active, accurate Word of God. It pierces. It penetrates.

It probes in every direction into the innermost recesses of a person's thoughts and heart and soul and spiritual being. And it does so with accurate precision, bringing to light what is in us.

[25 : 45] That's the Word of God. You know, it seems that there are a lot of people today, especially in our day, who are attempting to judge the accuracy of God's Word.

You know, what parts are true and what parts are not. And more often we hear people trying to tell us what is relevant and what is irrelevant.

You know, I mean, it is an ancient book, you know, and maybe it just is not relevant in some cases or in some parts of it. Or not relevant for our culture, our society. Maybe not relevant for every age. You know, and there are all kinds of arguments out there about that. And it's greatly affected, infected, the preaching of God's Word in the church. There's a lot of people involved in that, but I've got news for them.

We don't judge God's Word. Where did we ever get the idea we could judge it? These are the words of God. Rather, it's God's Word that judges us.

[26 : 48] And so, contrary to kind of the conventional thought of our day that's kind of permeating much of the church today, we do not make the Bible relevant.

Now, I know I understand what some of them mean by that. I mean, I want to make it relevant in the sense that I want to explain it. And for us to understand its meaning.

And that's what makes it relevant. But we don't, in that sense, make the Bible relevant. That's not something we can do. This book's the only thing on this earth that makes us relevant.

That's how we ought to think of the Word of God. Someone has said that trying to destroy or defend the Word of God is like two men pushing with toothpicks on opposite sides of the Rock of Gibraltar. You know, where one guy is trying to push it over with his toothpick, and the other is trying to hold it up with his toothpick. It's a ridiculous notion, isn't it? The Rock of Gibraltar is going to stand firm regardless of the efforts of either of those two guys.

[27 : 57] And the same is true, even more true. I guess conceivably we could think that, yeah, you could push over the Rock of Gibraltar by our own human efforts.

But you cannot, cannot judge God's Word. You cannot defend it. It defends itself. What we need to do is understand it, its meaning, and be faithful and accurate in our proclamation of it.

But it's the Word of God. I read an article or story, rather, about Harry Ironside, a great preacher from many, many years ago.

And he told this story about a, well, I guess we could call him an armchair critic, art critic. And I just want to read it to you. It's rather interesting. Here's how it goes.

The elderly, an elderly gentleman who was very nearsighted, prided himself on his ability as an art critic. And so while accompanying some friends through a large gallery, he sought to display his real or fancied knowledge of pictures to his friends.

[29 : 09] Problem, though, he left his glasses at home and was not able to see things very clearly. And so standing before a large frame, he began to point out the inartistic features of the picture there revealed.

The frame, he said, is altogether out of keeping with the subject. And as for the subject itself, and it was that of a man, it is altogether too homely, you know, homely, in fact, too ugly ever to make a

good picture.

It is a great mistake for any artist to choose a homely, as homely, so homely a subject for a picture if he expects it to be a masterpiece.

And the old gentleman was going on and on like this when his wife managed to finally get his attention and whispered in his ear, Honey, you're looking at a mirror. You see, that's God's word, in a sense.

It is a mirror. It reflects who we are. The truth about us, and it's accurate in its reflection.

[30 : 26] It always tells the truth about us. That's the word of God. It is the actively living, effectively powerful, probing, penetrating word of truth.

Martin Luther once wrote, The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold on me. Right?

Next, the written word of God is able. Number four. God's word is alive, active, accurate, and able. Paul says, Able to the piercing, even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow. Now, what in the world does that mean? Well, the best I understand from the language, the idea here is not one of separation. Separation.

That is, separating all the various parts of us. But rather, we're to understand it this way, it's one of revelation. Revelation. That is, it probes down to our very souls.

[31 : 40] And when it probes, it reveals what is there. It reveals what, all that is in us. And so, the preposition used by Paul is, I think, better translated with the word through, rather than to.

Piercing even through to the division of soul and spirit and souls, of joints and marrow. The word of God is able to penetrate through every part of me.

Not separating me into various parts so that I just kind of fall apart. But rather, revealing, revealing what is in me. Like that two-edged sword.

The word of God penetrates through the soul and spirit and joints and marrow. It is going through. See, and nothing can keep it from penetrating through.

For example, if someone were to, you know, stand before me with a razor-sharp two-edged sword. And if they had a mind to, and if I was willing, which I would not be, they could run that sword through my body anywhere they wished.

[32 : 46] I mean, through my muscle, through bone, through joints, through marrow, through my heart, through any other organ. And that sword, that two-edged, sharp two-edged sword could go in every direction and reveal all that is in there.

All of my gory, the gory details inside my body. Yuck. But it could. And yet, the illustration falls apart to a point because no man-made sword, no man-made instrument of any kind is able to penetrate through and probe the soul and the spirit, the innermost being.

No earthly sword is able to do that. But God's word is able to do that. It's able, and it does. And then one more. And I'll use two A's this time, okay?

God's word is absolute in its analysis. All right? Paul said, for the word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Did you know that the word of God is your best and worst critic? The word discerner here in the text is the Greek word kritikos.

[34 : 25] And if that sounds like a little bit like critic to you, then rightfully so because that's the word from which we get our word critic. Kritikos, discerner.

God's word is the perfect critic. Not necessarily always the agreeable critic, but the perfect one. Perfect critic.

The word of God analyzes the facts, also analyzes motives and intentions and analyzes all of our beliefs and so forth. And it makes no mistakes in its analysis.

Or maybe I should really use the word judgment. Makes no mistakes about that. You know, one day, the living word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, he's going to judge every one of us.

And the only thing that will really count with him is the thoughts and intents of the heart. And actually, if you want to know the truth of it, we do know the truth. That's the only thing that matters to him now.

[35 : 30] The matters of the heart. The intents of the heart. God's word has no problem, you see, probing every recess of my inner being to sift out and to lay bare and to analyze every thought, every motive, every intention of the heart.

Has no problem doing that. One reason why we sometimes don't want to read God's word. Because we don't want the truth. It's like not going to the doctor because you're afraid of what he's going to say to you.

What he's going to find. We don't want to take an x-ray. Afraid to. Because we don't want to know the truth about what's inside. Or what may be there.

So the word of God, it is alive, active, able, accurate, absolute in its analysis. All right, so the point of all this is this. The Bible is a whole lot more than just a book of promises.

To many, that's all it is. But it's more than that. The Bible was not written by 45 different authors over a space of 1,500 years and all of them agreeing with one another.

[36 : 48] It wasn't done just to awe us or to give us warm fuzzies or something like that. This book is more often searching, convicting, condemning.

Yes, condemning. And so it has an unsettling effect at times when it is read and when it is studied. When we read it, when we study it. Especially if we study it for all it's worth. It gets under our skin.

We could use that expression. It cuts to the quick. That's another expression. It is.

It has a double edge. And by the way, it cuts my way too. Just like it cuts your way. And the devil hates the Word of God.

Hates it. And is constantly at work to try to destroy it. Why? Because it changes lives. Accomplishes God's purpose for good. And the story has been told of a South Sea Islander.

[37 : 53] Kind of one of these natives. Story about a native who proudly displayed his Bible to a GI during World War II. And the soldier looked at the Bible and he scoffed at the Islander.

And he said, oh, I've outgrown that sort of stuff. And the native smiled to the soldier and he said, it's a good thing that we haven't. Because if we haven't, hadn't, you'd be supper right now.

The devil is not the only one who hates God's Word. Many people hate God's Word. And also the preaching, the faithful and uncompromised preaching of God's Word.

Even, God help us, but it's true, men and women who consider themselves to be Bible-believing Christians sometimes have a disdain for the Word of God.

God's searching and convicting Word. And so what is Paul's point? That God's Word is actively alive and accurately able to analyze absolutely what is in the heart of me and you.

[39 : 01] And no other book is able to do that. And when this book does that kind of work, and it does it often, then we have but one place to go. To God's throne of grace.

It drives us there. And so it convicts us so that we might be acquitted when we run to God's throne of grace.

It condemns us that we might be forgiven when we come to God's throne of grace. It reveals that we might be changed when we come to God's throne of grace.

It cuts, yes it does, it cuts that we might be healed when we take the bold approach and go before, boldly before God's throne of grace.

One other story. Some Christians, actually missionaries in India some years ago, were handing out gospel tracts and they wanted to stamp on the back of the gospel tract Matthew 11, 28.

[40 : 07] But they didn't have a stamp for that. And they couldn't find anyone who could make such and construct such a stamp with that Bible verse on it until they came across this Muslim man who agreed to make the stamp.

And so he began to work on that and he carved, literally hand carved the passage in the rubber part of the stamp. And he did an excellent job. And yet, as you probably guessed, while he was doing the work on the rubber stamp, God was also doing work in his heart with that verse of Scripture.

And this Muslim was saved, gloriously saved. And all it took was this one passage of Scripture, Matthew 11, 28, Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Later on, this Muslim would testify as to how he was brought to faith in Christ. And he said this, he said, While I was cutting those words into the rubber of the stamp, God was cutting them into my heart.

See, that's the nature of God's Word. The probing nature of Scripture.

[41 : 27] Thank you.